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AN

# ADDRESS

TO

THE CITIZENS OF PHILADELPHIA,

ON THE

## SUBJECT OF SLAVERY.

DELIVERED

On the 4th of 7th Month, (July,) A. D. 1833.

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BY

**EDWIN P. ATLEE, M. D.**  
OF PHILADELPHIA.

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PHILADELPHIA :

PUBLISHED BY PARTICULAR REQUEST.

Wm. P. Gibbons, Printer.

.....  
1833.

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B. E. G. / f. m. d.

## AN ADDRESS, &c.

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FELLOW CITIZENS—It has been customary since the establishment of the government of these United States, for the citizens of the Republic, in various sections, to meet together on the annual return of *this* day, to commemorate the glorious era on which that incomparable and illustrious band of patriots of 1776 gave to the world the declaration of our independence.

As a remembrancer of times, circumstances and events, which in ages to come are to influence the destiny of this nation, and through it, perhaps, that of the governments of the whole civilized world, it is proper that *we*, who are peacefully enjoying the inestimable privileges of that freedom, for the accomplishment of which our forefathers fearlessly staked their “lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honour,” should embrace the opportunity of so auspicious an occasion, to inquire how far *we* have maintained and extended the happiness and security most likely to result from the steady pursuit of *original principles*.

It is our design, on the present occasion,—

- 1st. To inquire what were the fundamental principles of our Union.
- 2d. How far, in the organization of the present government of the United States, these principles were maintained by the venerated framers of our Constitution.
- 3d. What direful evil has, by them, through mistaken policy, been entailed upon the country.
- 4th. How, and by what means, the nation may be preserved from the inevitable and untimely destruction which the continuance of *this evil* must bring upon it.

1st. The fundamental principles upon which was based the great struggle for our national independence, are those contained in the following words, put forth "By the Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, July 4th, 1776," viz: "When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature, and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect for the opinions of mankind requires, that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

"We hold these truths to be *self-evident*, that *all men* are created equal—that they are endowed by *their Creator* with certain *inalienable rights*—that among these are, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their *just powers* from the *consent* of the governed: that whenever *any form* of government becomes *destructive* of these *ends*, it is *the right* of the people to *alter or abolish* it, and to institute a *new government*, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their *safety* and *happiness*. Prudence, indeed, will dictate, that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that *mankind* are more disposed to *suffer*, while evils are *sufferable*, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is *their right*, it is *their duty*, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security," &c.

Thus, fellow citizens, did our fathers proclaim the *self-evident*, and therefore unquestionable, *truths*, which present themselves to the mind of every rational man who reflects at all upon the laws of moral and social happiness; and after enumerating a long list of grievances and sufferings to which they

were unjustly subjected by the tyranny of Great Britain, arising out of the total disregard of an unnatural government, to the inalienable rights of man, they further declared, that in the prosecution of their designs, they felt "a firm reliance upon the protection of Divine Providence." The blessings of millions of freemen have arisen in sweet incense at the tombs of the fathers of our liberties, for their heroism in maintaining unmoved "the glorious cause of equal rights"—the almost spontaneous voice of *the people*, has awarded them a niche in the Temple of immortality—their very ashes have been declared as almost sacred—and the air has been annually rent by the thunders of our cannon, in evidence of a nation's jubilee. The powers of poetry and oratory have been exhausted in portraying the characters of the assembled sages of '76, and the happiness and prosperity of our *republican institutions*. And yet in the face of all this, as if to expose us before the nations of the earth to the extremest derision, there is engrafted upon our statutes, a system of oppression and despotism, unsurpassed by those of any people, civilized or barbarous.

The whole of the movements of the then colonies in obtaining emancipation from the thraldom of Great Britain; their defenceless condition compared with the strength and resources of the "mother country;" together with their novel views of government and morals, had excited an intense interest among the nations of Europe. Nothing but a total defeat, followed by a still more onerous and degrading vassalage, was predicted for "the rebels" and contemners of "the divine right of kings." In short, the chances of success were so uncertain, that the stoutest hearts almost quailed, in the contemplation of so unequal a contest. But the *principles* they promulgated were those of immutable justice, and of inalienable human rights. They were content, therefore, to advance and abide the issue.

2. Man, under the guidance of human reason alone, is mainly the creature of circumstances, changing his character and feelings according to the condition in which those circumstances may place him. All history proves, unfortunately

for the dignity, and superiority of intelligence which *he* claims, that while adversity and persecution soften his heart, and produce benevolence towards his brethren, prosperity and power blunt the nobler feelings of his nature, and render him tyrannical. Notwithstanding the seeming sincerity of their movements, the honoured sages to whom was intrusted the framing (and adoption) of our Constitution, in the name of "the people of the United States," "in order to form a more perfect union, [than that attempted by the Confederation,] establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our *posterity*,"—those very sages, from motives of *worldly policy*, and *pretended expediency*, authorized the perpetuation of usurpations, which themselves had declared to be contrary to "the laws of nature and of nature's God." It is true there were many among them who opposed, while opposition was available, the continuance of such abuses as retarded the general welfare, and jeopardized the blessings of liberty. It is not enough for *posterity* to be told that the present government could not have been established without compromising the vital principles of our fathers. Better had it been for millions of our fellow men, if each state had been refused admittance into the Union, until prepared to conform to the spirit and letter of the Declaration of Independence. While we cheerfully unite in the expressions of gratitude for the inestimable privileges secured to some twelve millions of freemen, we feel compelled to protest against the entailment of an evil, authorized by the Magna Charta of which we so loudly boast.

3. The evil to which we allude, and which our Constitution perpetuates, is slavery.

Whatever may have been the necessity, in the then existing state of things, for the formation of a *General Government*, it is deeply to be regretted that some clause was not introduced into the Constitution, fixing a time for the entire abolition of slavery. The glaring inconsistency of the toleration of so great an evil, led the friends of universal emancipation to espouse the cause of the oppressed descendants of Africa. By

their untiring zeal in combating the specious pleadings of cupidity and avarice, the public mind was enlightened to perceive the enormities of the system, and its abolition was provided for in a number of the states, by their legislatures. Had the convention of delegates of 1787, maintained original principles in their purity, the nation might have been at this day a nation of freemen, uniting as the voice of one man, in hal-lelujahs for rights and privileges granted to no other people under the canopy of Heaven. To show the amount of despotism practised by the *freemen* of this republic, we will review the census, as taken at the several times since the year 1787.

In 1790, there were 697,897 slaves. In 1800, 893,041. In 1810, 1,192,364. In 1820, 1,538,038. In 1830, 2,009,043. Showing the increase in 40 years, to be at the rate of about 32 per cent. The annual increase of the slave population, at the present time, is not less than 60,000.

Let us now examine whether the white population has advanced in the ratio of the coloured, since the year 1790, in the slave holding states. At that time the whites numbered 101, to 57 coloured persons; but in the census for 1830 they stood in the proportion of 101, to 63. Instead, therefore, of advancing, they have depreciated 6 per cent.

The constant disproportion, and alarming encroachment, as to numbers, of the coloured population, induced a train of circumstances which early gave rise to discordant views and opposite interests among our sister states. The *cause* was diligently concealed as long as ignorance and sophistry could hold dominion. At length, (that is after a continuance in tyranny until the retributive justice, alluded to by Jefferson, appeared about to fall upon those who were so pseudo-republican, inhuman, and unchristian, as to hold property in their fellow man,) slavery was acknowledged to be *an evil* which ought to be remedied. Yes, my fellow citizens, it was not until the number of slaves had increased from 697,897 to 1,538,039, or in other words, after the expiration of 44 years from the Declaration of Independence, that a portion of the very people whose representatives in general congress assem-

bled, July 4th, 1776, had solemnly appealed "to the Supreme Judge of the world, for the rectitude of their intentions," in announcing the inalienable *right* of every man to *freedom*, was prepared to acknowledge that *slavery is an evil*.

About the year 1820, there were discovered some leading men in the slave holding states, who appeared desirous of applying a remedy. Long antecedent, however, to this period of time, there had issued appeals from some of the greatest and best of our countrymen, such as Rush, Franklin, Wistar, and a host of other philanthropists, on the subject of slavery, sufficiently powerful to have convinced the most obdurate. As members of "The Pennsylvania Society for promoting the abolition of slavery," &c., founded in 1774, while these states were still colonies of Great Britain, they had zealously advocated the cause of emancipation, and had shown the impolicy and inevitable consequences of the slave system. Let it be remembered that at that time slavery existed in all the colonies, and therefore *they* were as unjustifiable as *we*, in meddling with "the delicate subject." Yet, relying on the justice and equity of their cause, they relaxed not in their efforts until a majority of the original states had made arrangements for its total abolition.

Unhappily for the cause of humanity and of righteous government, the admissions granted by our Constitution, to the right of property in the bodies of our fellow men, opened the door to the reception of additional states into our Union, in which slavery was legalized. The blackness of darkness about to be dispelled from our horizon, through the instrumentality of the cheering rays of gradual emancipation, again arose, and has been rapidly accumulating, until its fearful portent threatens our beloved country with some dire convulsion. Already have been heard the distant thunders of Divine displeasure—vivid flashes have been seen to cross and chequer the black clouds which were gathering, with the insignia of wrath. When our political firmament shall become obscured,—when the impending storm shall burst upon us, is known only to "Him who inhabiteth eternity." Yet may we experience redemption from the approaching de-

struction—our waste places may be rebuilt—our foundations raised up for the safety of many generations—our light may rise in obscurity, and our darkness be as noonday, if we repent of our iniquities, “break every yoke, undo the heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free.”

The process of gradual abolition having been early adopted by several of the states, and before the influence of the slave system had become interwoven with their whole social fabric, has erased the foul stain from their statute books, for ever. At this moment, twelve out of the twenty-four states, are free from legalized slavery. Shall *we*, who compose the great majority of *the sovereign people*, and who know and *feel* the ennobling operations of unalloyed *freedom*; shall *we* whose homes and firesides are the abode of contentment and happiness—whose families and kindred may lie down to rest without the dread of insurrection and murder, from the victims of their oppression—shall *we*, whose attachment to the *Union* must at least be *as fervent* as that of our slave holding brethren, and whose interest and deep anxiety for the permanent welfare of posterity must be proportionate to the bounds which encircle us—shall *we* cease to expostulate with the minority, or to intreat them no longer to defy “the God and Father of us all,” “whose justice will not sleep for ever?” Never, until every human being within *their jurisdiction* shall be free.

4. But, say the abettors of slavery, the evil has been entailed upon us;—how shall we get rid of it without terrible consequences?

We answer, by total abolition. Not gradual, but immediate. *Immediate*, because the voice of justice demands it. *Immediate*, because every hour is adding to the mass of our oppressed fellow beings, whose cries and groans and blood, are calling unto God for deliverance. Not less than *one thousand* per week are added to the number of those, born “in the image of God,” and heirs, and joint heirs with us in immortality, who are doomed, by our laws, to interminable degradation;—whose bodies are classed with “the beasts that perish,” and from whose souls are shut out, *by statute*, the rays

of intellectual comfort, and the beams of gospel consolation,  
to which every *Christian* is entitled.

“ Yet Afric’s sons, the beasts of burden here,  
Freed from the lash awhile, prefer their prayer—  
Waft their deep woes in sighs unto their God,  
And groans, which pierce *Compassion’s* blest abode.”

Shall the *freemen* of this nation listlessly look at these awful truths, without seeking *the* remedy?

We use the *definite* phraseology, because we believe nothing but immediate abolition will meet the exigencies of our situation. By this we do not mean that the shackles of slavery shall be instantly severed, and the slaves cast out upon the country without the restrictions of wholesome laws. This would be turning a state of vassalage into that of licentiousness, and accumulating, instead of lessening our calamity. In the language of one of the ablest and most learned of those connected with what are termed the “ *divines* ” of the age, who now “ rests from his labours,” and whose works do follow him—the term is to be used *relatively*, as contrasted with *gradual*. “ The meaning of the word, as used by us, is perfectly clear, and cannot be misapprehended by any one: it is not to be made a subject of metaphysical animadversion: it is to be understood under the direction of common sense, and especially as modified and expounded by those statements with which it is associated: viewed in that light, *immediate abolition* is not merely an unintelligible phrase, but one that does not warrant a particle of the alarm which some have affected to take at it, and is not liable to any one of those objections which some have been pleased to make to it. To say that we will come out of the sin by degrees—that we will only forsake it slowly, and step by step—that we will pause and hesitate, and look well about us, before we consent to abandon its gains and pleasures—that we will allow another age to pass by ere we throw off the load of iniquity that is lying so heavy upon us, lest certain secularities should be injuriously affected—and that we will postpone the duty of “ doing justly and loving mercy,” till we have removed every petty diffi-

gutty out of the way, and gotten all the conflicting interests that are involved in the measure, reconciled and satisfied:— to say this, is to trample on the demands of moral obligation, and to disregard the voice which speaks to us from Heaven. The path of duty is plain before us, and we have nothing to do but to enter it at once, and to walk in it, without turning to the right hand or to the left." The first step to be taken is, to repeal every law which denies the slave the acknowledged rights of every man. Secondly, to open the way for his intellectual and moral culture. Third, to point him to the way that leads to present happiness, and to eternal peace—and to draw him near to us by the cords of Christian love. All this may be done at once, and all the fancied horrors of insurrection and murder will vanish into "airy nothing." If it be true that "righteousness exalteth a nation," then shall our beloved country, divested of this load of sinfulness, rise higher and higher, and approach nearer and nearer to the summit of earthly prosperity.

To suppose that any other than total abolition, will afford the specific our national constitution demands, is to suppose that mere palliatives ever removed a malady. However useful and comforting they may appear for the time, the march of the disease is onward, and inevitable dissolution is the result. The palliatives, *in themselves*, are nevertheless worthy of some consideration. Such is the consideration which the *genuine abolitionist* awards to African colonization. He believes in the possibility of bettering the condition of *the few*. The *mass* of the coloured population, he *knows* can never be transported. In fine, his powers of calculation are bewildered in the contemplation of how an annual increase of 56,000 slaves, can be provided for in any distant colony? The average price of transporting each individual will, at the lowest possible sum, be 20 dollars. This allowance we know to be too little by one half. But grant that it takes no more, the incredible sum of \$1,120,000 would be required simply for transportation, without the necessary appropriations for sustaining the colonists until they were enabled to take care of themselves. This would swell the sum to at least double the

amount. Whence is it to be derived? And if supplied, remember that 2,000,000 of our fellow men remain in bondage.

As a means, therefore, of totally abolishing *the evil*, colonization is incompetent. The condition of *the few*, who by the benevolent intentions of those who are interested in the subject, are improved, although satisfactory so far as it goes, can never make amends for the constant plundering of millions of their most sacred rights—neither can it materially lessen the mass of crime and wretchedness, as it now exists. Abolition and colonization are distinct subjects—in their places, capable of much good. But when the friends of either, influenced by a “zeal without knowledge,” denounce the other, evil may ensue to both. Our fellow citizens have the undoubted right to exercise their privilege to contribute to the advancement of either; and the advocates of each have the right to be heard patiently. The columns of the press throughout the country should be opened for the calm, deliberate and judicious consideration of the real claims of both. “An evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit,” neither can malice, vituperation and slander be the fruit of good principles. In the discussion of the two subjects before the community at large, the champions of both sides have too often descended from the true dignity of the advocates of Christian benevolence, and losing sight of truth and soberness, have marred the beauty which each claims for its design.

The main reasons urged, by the friends of colonization, against immediate abolition, are these. 1st. They assert that “its effects would be to spread discord and devastation from one end of the Union to the other.” 2d. That “the condition of the slave, suddenly emancipated, and thrown upon his own resources, is very far from being improved; and, however laudable the feeling which leads to such emancipation, its policy and propriety are at least questionable.” 3d. That “observation has fully convinced them that *emancipation* has often been injurious to both master and slave”—that “it is highly probable that the *manumitted* would not only be poor and wretched, but likewise a public nuisance.” Again, “that it is not *right* that men should be *free*, when their freedom

would prove injurious to themselves and others." Our reply is, that the manner of observation used by them and us is very dissimilar. We have been made satisfied from *facts* which cannot be controverted, that no danger whatever is to be anticipated from immediate emancipation, as called for by us. We ask your deliberate attention while we recur to some of them.

History informs us that after the instantaneous emancipation of the slaves at St. Domingo, by the act of the National Convention of France, in the month of February, 1794, no such confusion and destruction resulted. Malenfant, who resided in the island at the time, says, "After this public act of emancipation, the Negroes *remained quiet*, both in the south and in the west, *and they continued to work upon all the plantations*. Upon those estates which were abandoned, they *continued their labours*, where there were any, even inferior agents, to guide them: and on those estates where no white men were left to direct them, they *betook themselves* to the planting of provisions; but upon *all the plantations* where the whites resided, the blacks *continued to labour as quietly as before*. On the plantation Gourad, consisting of more than 450 labourers, *not a single Negro refused to work*; and yet this plantation was thought to be under the worst discipline, and the slaves *the most idle*, of any in the plain." Lacroix, who published his "Memoirs for a History of St. Domingo," at Paris, in the year 1819, uses this language, viz.:—"The colony marched, *as by enchantment*, towards its ancient splendour; *civilisation prospered*; every day produced perceptible proofs of its progress. The city of the Cape, and the plantations of the north, rose up again visibly to the eye." Vincent, who was a brigadier general of artillery in St. Domingo, and proprietor of estates in that island, at the same period, declared to the Directory of France, that "*every thing was going on well in St. Domingo*. The proprietors were in peaceable possession of their estates; cultivation was making rapid progress; and *the blacks were industrious, and beyond example happy*." In Mexico, and in Colombia, the immediate abolition of slavery has caused no insurrections, but evidently increased the

stability of the governments. The slaves, amounting to 2,000, who had joined the British standard, and continued under its protection after the close of our revolutionary war, and who were manumitted by the British government, and settled in Nova Scotia, according to Clarkson, whose historical facts are beyond contradiction, "led a harmless life, and gained the character of an industrious and honest people, from their *white* neighbours."—"A large number [as free labourers] are now earning their livelihood, and with so much industry and good conduct, that the calumnies originally spread against them, have entirely died away."

Joshua Steele, the proprietor of large slave estates, or plantations, in Barbadoes, and who had determined to test the influences of *voluntary* and *involuntary* labour, among the slaves belonging to his several plantations, by allowing them compensation, instead of applying the lash, declares, in a letter to his friend Dr. Dickson, "that during the operations under the premium, his people became contented, and in *a little better than four years, the annual nett clearance of his property was more than triple.*" That accordingly, "he soon dismissed his superintendent." This experiment, made in the midst of other plantations, had no injurious effect upon the neighbouring estates, by the production of insurrection, &c.

Having now produced such evidence as we consider conclusive, in proof of the position that the dangers apprehended from immediate abolition, are entirely ideal and illusory—we shall leave those who differ from us in opinion to pursue their own course, with the hope, that in all their proceedings they may constantly remember the injunction to "do unto others as ye would wish them to do unto you."

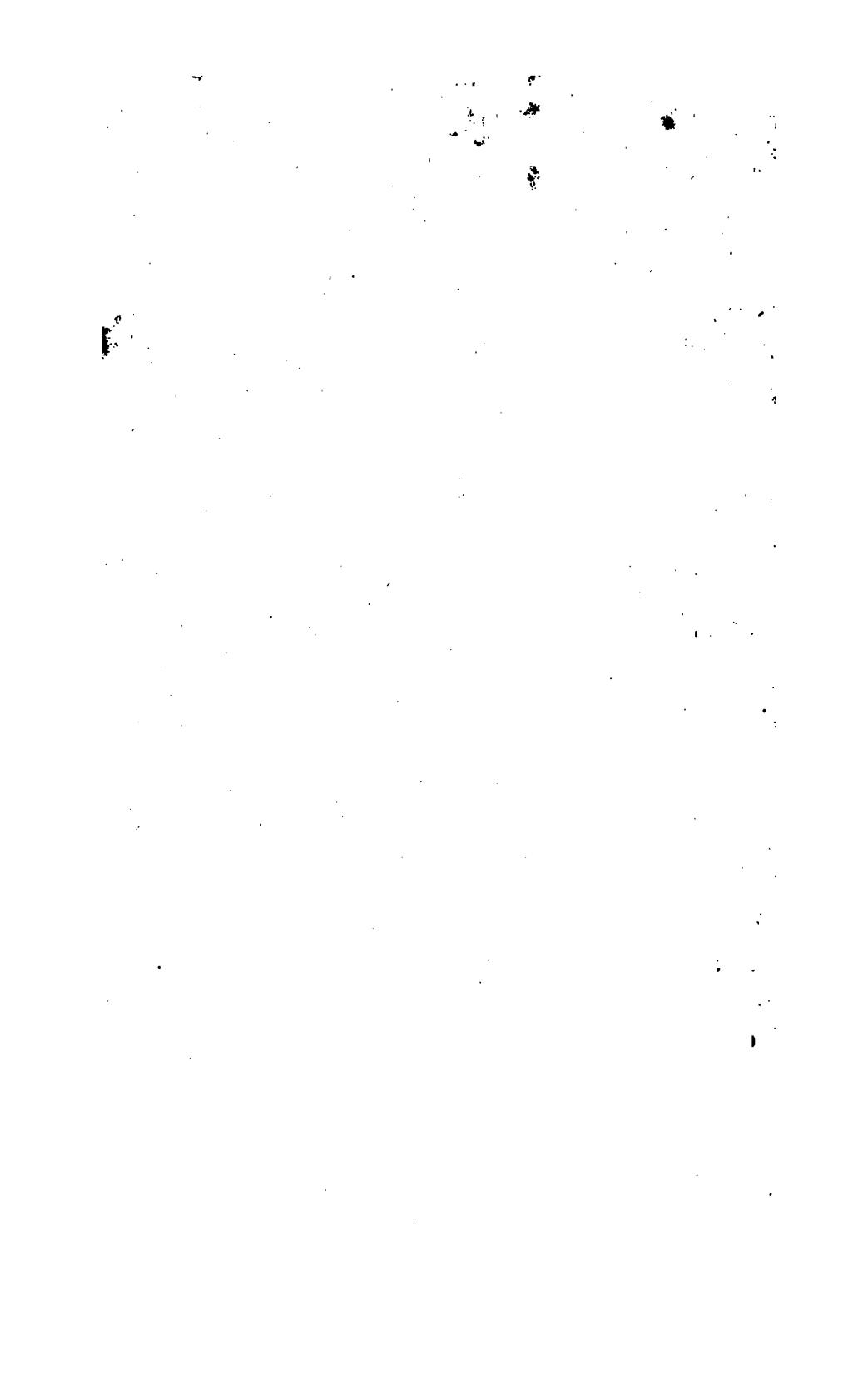
Fellow citizens—Let us once more turn our attention to the fact, that we are now convened on the fifty-seventh anniversary of our independence as a nation. Let us once more contrast the *principles* we profess, with the *practice* we pursue. Let us, while we are rejoicing in our liberty, forget not that this "land of the free" is polluted by the footsteps of more than *two millions* of human beings, whose hearts dare not par-

ticipate with ours, in the song of freedom, and whose souls are bowed down by the debasing chains of slavery.

Sons and daughters of Columbia ! shall revolving years bring no deliverance to the oppressed ? Shall *all* the tender ties which sweeten life, continue to be severed at the nod of tyrant man ? Shall that *one spot*, of ten miles square, within whose limits, meet the representatives of *all* the states, and over which *they* hold entire jurisdiction, be still profaned by marts and prison houses for the sale of human flesh and sinews ? Shall thousands of a race, created with "a skin not coloured like our own," be still concentrated in this district, "where the sounds of the clanking fetters, mingle with the voices of American statesmen, legislating for a free people?" Shall *all* these flagrant inconsistencies, in the view of foreign nations, and more especially of the very government against whose usurpations, and whose despotic sway, our fathers fearlessly recorded their solemn protest, continue longer to draw forth the imprecations of insulted and indignant humanity ?

We pause for your reply.

We beseech you, therefore, by your regard for justice and the rights of man—by your religion, and the enduring welfare of our common country—by your respect for yourselves, and your interest in the happiness of unborn millions, not to relax in the efforts of philanthropy, and in the vindication of equal rights—not to disregard the luminous admonitions of Sacred Truth—nor to stifle the rising spirit of pure patriotism: not to withhold your appeals to our brethren of the South, and your remonstrances to our National Councils, until the emblems and horrors of slavery shall cease to exist, and the blood stains upon our soil be expunged for ever.









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